



Graham Thew

Thoughts about making the most of your art course or workshop experience

The observations and points in this article are made in order to help you make the most of your experience. They mostly apply to all day workshops, weekend breaks and longer holidays and I have written them in a *cover-all* way referring to “courses” in order to cover all these types of fun art experiences.

Carefully read the details of the venue and course so that you will have a good idea of what to expect. Preferably before you sign up!

This sounds like an obvious thing to do but you would be surprised at the participants who arrive and realise that the content of the course isn't really what they thought it would be. This is distressing not only for the participant but also for those running the course. Have no hesitation in asking questions before you sign up. The people running the course are intent on ensuring that you enjoy yourself and will be completely forthcoming about what you can expect. Any good course will publish a detailed agenda in advance so that you can prepare along with a list of things you will need to bring (see below).

Know who your tutor is.

The course details will probably have a potted c.v. about the tutor but there is no harm in digging a little deeper! Most tutors will have their own websites with examples of their work. If you don't like their style, their technique, their methods, or *for example* you find that they only do abstract work and you wanted portraits, it is unlikely that you are going to enjoy the course. Research their background, and if possible ask around and find others who may have attended the previous courses run by the tutor. You should feel free to contact the tutor in advance, say by email, and they should be happy to share what they have in mind for the course so that you can put some prior thoughts in place.

Prepare well before the course.

There is almost always a list of materials to bring along. Ensure that you look at this well in advance and turn up properly equipped. You may be asked to bring along reference material, photographs, or some of your previous work. If you don't have certain specified items, ask before you go to any outlandish expense and make sure of the specifications and standards expected. Again, any tutor worth their salt will be quite specific, but also knowledgeable about the alternatives to what they are expecting you to bring. If a course specifies for example, 300 gms watercolour paper, don't think that 120 gms cartridge paper will be an

acceptable alternative. You will compromise your own enjoyment by being ill or poorly equipped. But don't panic if you can't find exactly what has been specified drop the tutor an email to check if your proposed alternative will fit the bill.

Approach the experience with an open mind.

Be open to learning and have a willingness to participate and try new approaches, techniques and methods. Work along with the tutor who should be aware of your requirements and stretch you without breaking your confidence. Be prepared to make mistakes! Your tutor is there to help you through complicated exercises.

You must have heard the expression "we learn from our mistakes." Most art experimentation will lead to a greater awareness and so you will move forward.

Use the class to experiment.

Do not compare your work to others in the class.

Your work will be no better or worse than other's work. ***It will however be different.***

Comparing your work to others' is the curse of the amateur artist. It can destroy your confidence and enthusiasm and make you feel like taking up curling, macrame, or stamp collecting. Remember, everyone will have taken up art at different stages in their life, some will find it comes easily, some will find it is a mystery even after 40 years of applying themselves. ***Your prime motivation must be to enjoy yourself.*** To cherish the variation in work you see from others and to celebrate your own achievements.

Learn from the other students

There **is** a reason to look at other student's work and that is to learn from them. The beauty of these courses is that it is so easy to talk to others, for you know you have a common interest. You will thrive from the interaction and fun of the course, and it won't just be from the tutor that you learn. Look at the new techniques they may be trying, listen to the conversations they are having with the tutor and immerse yourself!

Keep notes during the course.

It's human nature to think you will remember all the concepts, techniques and methods discussed and used. But months later when you decide to settle down to do a bit of art it will surprise you just how much of the course and the discussions have slipped away. Take regular photographs to help as an aide memoire of the pictures produced. Pop a date on every sketch, drawing and picture you do. It's so nice to look back at a later time and see just how much you have progressed.

If the course is organised well, the Tutor enthusiastic, and the surroundings comfortable, it won't be a trial to thoroughly enjoy your experience. If you do - don't forget to fill in your feedback form. And a few days after you have returned home, drop an email to the tutor to say "thank you" if you enjoyed the course. Tutors thrive on encouragement too!

Graham Thew Art. grahamthew25@gmail.com. website: grahamthewart.uk